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FW: Follow up on Hampton Roads events

1 message

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Fri, Sep 28, 2012 at 10:22 AM

To: Dave Forster <dave.forster@pilotonline.com>

From: Sorrell, Constance S. (VDOT)

Sent: Tuesday, September 18, 2012 4:38 PM

To: Kilpatrick, Charlie A., P.E. (VDOT)

Cc: Whirley, G. A. 'Greg' (VDOT)

Subject: Follow up on Hampton Roads events

Importance: High

Charlie,

As chief of system operation I should be part of the team that reviews the changed plan the district develops.

Here are some of the issues I have uncovered in my conversations with some of the parties;

First: Planning for the event

- **MOST IMPORTANTLY: no consideration of what would happen in the event of a unexpected event. What would have we done in the region if the MMBT had had very bad crash or some other event that would have caused it to be unusable. What would we have done if there had been a fiery truck crash shutting down the MMBT? From a security standpoint, this was clearly not acceptable planning.**
- No involvement from Traffic Engineering to work with the construction side of the house to do any analysis/simulations as to what traffic backup there would be or develop a traffic management plan for it.
- No evaluation on consideration given to the high profile special events happening in the region that weekend, i.e. the Air Show in Virginia Beach
- When Stephany knew this was the plan he wrote emails to Tom Druhot, the ACE for the projects saying it was a very bad idea. Tom told him the decision was made. He also went to Mike Davis who also said the decision was made by Dennis. Mike Corwin the Traffic Engineering Section Manager also raised questions about the projects and was told the decision was made.
- Was the state police in the planning?

Two: During the event:

- No traffic information of any significance was reported in 511 or in Va Traffic Alerts. This was completely outside of policy and what we teach in the Duty officer school. The Central Office duty Officer never received a call from HR duty officer and neither did Perry. I also never received any communications other than something about the 511 system reporting problem which was fixed. The duty officers in Hampton Roads were Daytime: 10 am – 10 PM: Danny Graham and Nighttime: 10 PM – 10 AM: Adam Jack. That the management at the TOC didn't alert the district or CO management about how bad things were getting was clearly a breakdown in communications.
- No one called Dwayne to alert him to the traffic problems so he did not know what was happening.
- CO communications noticed all the bad traffic on Twitter and our Face book page. Hampton Roads requested the pages to be taken down. CO's response to that request was to say no, that it was unacceptable response to public criticism. The press release Dennis sent out was apparently the only message sent.
- Dennis called Charlie late Saturday night but did not convey the extent of the backups and delays.
- It wasn't just the interstate was clogged; the entire regional network was congested.
- Between noon and midnight were the most reported congested times. See Perry's email attached with

the history of the reports that were put into Va Traffic. It was listed only as a major event.

Three: Event recovery

- After the events, the district administrator sent out what was a inflammatory news release with two messages for the public:
"We told you to stay away" and "we stopped the work because we were finished," not because we were concerned about the public outcry. No involvement from the Central Office leadership was attempted before this news release was written and communicated.
- It takes the deputy chief holding a press conference two days after the event to issue a public apology and the CO Communications director to craft an appropriate message.
- The Governor makes a public statement because there is so much fury announcing there will be a complete reevaluation of the planning and no work will continue until that evaluation is done.

While the threshold for "high profile events" is a 10 miles backup in our written policy (rewritten after the 2008 Ice storm in NOVA), common sense would have dictated VaTraffic Reports that should have been coming from the district as high profile and folks should have been calling us. The duty officer in the district was not making the CO duty officer aware of the gravity of the situation so that it could be communicated to the Chief Deputy and Commissioner. It is inconceivable to me that with the significant delays that no one alerted CO to this. It is clear that our policy documents are pointed at addressing emergency not "planned events." So we definitely need to have some more definite instruction related to the planning of events in high congestion urban areas and reporting of extending congestion similar to what happened here.

Charlie, we had almost an identical situation with the Pinner's Point project no long after I had gone down there. The Project engineer, Mike Johnson and others in construction decided with the contractor to issue a change order to the sequence on construction that was to save time and money on the project. It was a million dollar Value Engineering proposal. Only one problem with it. No one on the project called in Traffic Engineering or the City of Portsmouth or the Port to discuss the change up in the sequence of construction and the impact t to traffic in Portsmouth and into PIT. IT was a complete gridlock situation the morning of the switch. To make a long story short. I called a meeting at the project for new that day with all the parties, including TE, to find out that NOTHING had been done to assess the impact of traffic. I gave the team 24 hours to evaluate the traffic pattern to see if anything could fix it or we were going back to the original sequence of construction. The team came up completely empty handed. We had a press conference that I made Dennis Gribok stand up and say he and the team made a mistake and they were going to go back to the former plan. It went a tremendous way to quell the public and we got a lot of accolades for admitting what everyone else knew, we had made a mistake. After that, I called the construction staff there at the time and we had a long discussion about how unacceptable it was to make this kind of a switch.

When we had the Statewide Command Center, we had someone 24/7 to be watching over the network from a statewide perspective and making sure that the regions were managing events. This is how the Commissioner found out about the ice storm in NOVA. The NOVA didn't call anyone but around 6:30pm Perry called me to alert me and the commissioner in a meeting to what was taking place. We need to reinstate this small staffing particularly with the new contract we will have.

We are right back to 2003 in the eyes of the public in Hampton Roads. Everything we have worked so hard to turn around has been undone with this completely ill-conceived plan. In addition to have a more thorough review of the two projects and how to re-plan them. We need to have a complete reeducation of the construction staffing down there about what their responsibilities are related to traffic management.

Connie